

**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest**

**“Life’s most persistent and urgent question: ‘What are you doing for others?’”**

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Grade: 8

Age: 14

For some students Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is just some day in January we get out of school for some guy having a dream, but for others it is a time to celebrate the sacrifice a great man made for the civil rights of Americans. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a very important man, and made one of most significant impacts in our country's history. He was an eloquent speaker and his words moved people to action. "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness. This is the judgment. Life's most persistent and urgent question is: 'What are you doing for others?'" (MLK)

Even though he was just one man, he changed a nation. He participated in many non-violent protests over the course of the 1950's and 1960's to bring about an end to the segregation of black people in schools and public places. He encouraged people of color to sit at restaurant tables that said they would serve "whites only". They would wait to be served and even when no service came they stood their ground through all the harassment and disrespect, when people would said they had no place being there and threatened them. Dr. King gave people hope that someday they would have equal rights to personal liberty and freedom, or civil rights.

In 1963 he led the "March on Washington," where he addressed over a quarter-million people at the national mall. It was there Dr. King's inspirational "I Have a Dream" speech influenced the nation to act on civil rights. Then in 1964, Congress passed the landmark Civil Rights Act granting political, social and economic rights to all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, or national origin. Our nation was getting closer to reaching Dr. King's dream, but even today, especially since 9/11, we are still trying to balance equal rights with national security. In the spirit of MLK, Jr., the recent Occupy Wall Street movement has staged (mostly) peaceful protests to bring attention to social and economic injustices and their crusade has spread around the country, including Seattle. Just imagine how the world would be if everyone shared Dr. King's dream, hopefully one day it could happen.

In the time of segregation black people felt misunderstood, hurt, and offended; several kids at my school still have difficulties with racist comments and jokes today. Also students are regularly intimidated by aggressors whose purpose is to make others feel badly, in order to make the "bullies" feel better about themselves. This is essentially

what happened during civil rights movement times; just because others were different, people were cruel to them. On top of everything black people were treated unethically in school and many other places. Kids are still being treated unfairly in school.

Lately at my school we have been learning about how to become better people and to be kinder to others. We also have our school's Core Values: compassion, integrity, respect, and responsibly. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. showed these traits on a regular basis. He didn't just do this for fame, he did it because as a Baptist minister it was true to his morals and faith to stand up for what was right. I have learned that showing empathy can change a person's day and I should show my integrity by doing what is just. By working towards equal rights together people of all races were able to overcome, just picture if everyone came together what kind of things we could accomplish in our world today.

So why can't we lend a helping hand to our fellow man? Dr. King said "Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love." (MLK) Don't think just because you're a single person you can't make a difference, because you can. Start with little things; you don't have to move a mountain in day. Dr. King's life has shown us that every person, regardless of color or background, has an opportunity to change the world through their own dedication and determination.

Even though Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life ended with an assassin's bullet on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, his legacy is one of nonviolence and equality and his words and actions remind us why each of us has a duty to help others. So as we take a day off to celebrate the King Holiday on the third Monday of January, we take time to remember the man and his cause. It is also a day to answer his question, "What are you doing for others?" (MLK) by realizing that everyone can serve others through community service and living by the values of compassion, integrity, respect, and responsibility.

## **Bibliography**

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Editor: Doesn't say

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